



Hamlets of the Adirondacks

Hamlets of the Adirondacks:
History, Preservation and Investment

Credits

This publication was prepared by:

Roger Trancik, ASLA
Urban Design Consultant
Ithaca, New York

Roger Trancik was principal-in-charge, Dan Krall, project planner and Paula Horrigan, project assistant. The work was performed for, and with the continued input from the four participating counties and their planning directors: Fred Aufchlager, AICP - Clinton County, William Johnston, AICP - Essex County, Ernest Lorenzen - Hamilton County, and Mary Burns Verlaque — St. Lawrence County. Staff members of each county planning office also made significant contributions. James Hotaling, Chief of Local Government Services of the Adirondack Park Agency, provided valuable and ongoing input.

We are most grateful to the above client group for their patience, insight and lively dialogue they provided at our biweekly sessions which made this project particularly rewarding.

Many other individuals and groups provided valuable information, encouragement and assistance. Dr. David Allee and his team of Adirondack researchers at Cornell University were particularly supportive and helpful on a daily basis. Without their guidance, especially in the data gathering phase, this project would have fallen short of the mark. We are also grateful for their financial support toward publishing the work. Dr. Theodore Hullar, Director of Research, Professor Stuart Stein and Professor Richard Booth, Esq., all of Cornell, provided invaluable ideas during the project's early conceptual stages. Craig Gilborn, Director of the Adirondack Museum, and his able staff

were primary supporters of our efforts, providing us with accommodations at the Museum, historic knowledge and images of which several are printed in this document. David Gross, North Country Cooperative Extension, also made significant contributions through numerous meetings and conversations, as did Roger Tubby and the Adirondack North Country Association.

The implementation of the work was assisted by the capable services of Rose-marie Tucker, typist and administrative aide. Cornell's Graphic Arts Division was responsible for printing and photo services, and Davis Graphic Services for the reproduction work and typesetting.

The preparation of this document was financially aided through a grant from the State of New York pursuant to Chapter 53, Subdivision I of the Laws of New York of 1982; Contract Number: C000116. The Adirondack Park Agency administered the contract and funding for the study. Printing was assisted by the four participating counties, the Adirondack Park Agency and the Adirondack Museum in memory of Harold K. Hochschild, founder of the Adirondack Museum and former chairman of the Temporary Study Commission on the Future of the Adirondacks.

The contents of this publication reflect the views of many individuals and institutions, yet do not represent the official position of any sponsoring agency.

August 31, 1983

Cover image:

"Old Adirondac"—home of the McIntyre Iron Works, one of the earliest Adirondack investments

Contents

	Page
Preface	
Chapter One: The Process Begins	7
Development and Preservation	
Reasons for the Study	
Designing the Study	
Plight of the Hamlets	
Mysterious Adirondack Qualities	
Chapter Two: The Hamlets in Time	13
Early Settlements	
New York Fever	
The Cornucopia Never Fills	
Eyes to the West	
The Quest for Resources: Lumber and Mines	
The Impassable Wilderness	
The Gilded Age	
Wilderness Cure	
The Modern Era: Growth of Tourism	
Chapter Three: The Hamlets Are Analyzed	18
Inventory Questionnaires	
Hamlet Site Visits	
Hamlet Research	
Issues Workshops	
Matrix Compilation	
Data Selection	
Chapter Four: The Hamlets Are Grouped	22
Geographic Groupings	
Functional Groupings	
Physical Types	
Chapter Five: The Hamlets in Focus	45
Hamlet Personality Sketches	
Sample Communities	
Chapter Six: The Next Step	55
Marketing the Hamlets	
Ideas for Action	
Amenity Frontage Concept	
Getting the Funds	
Phase Two	
Sources	

PICTURE CREDITS: Most photographs in this publication are by the authors, except for those otherwise credited on the same page or those acknowledged in the following references:

Cover, page 14 (rt) · Benson J. Lossing, *The Hudson, from the Wilderness to the Seas*, in *Township 34*, Harold K. Hochschild, 1952, Courtesy of the Adirondack Museum. Page 13 (lr), 16 (tc), 16 (lr) · Courtesy of Maitland Desormo, *The Heydays of the Adirondacks*, Adirondack Yesteryears Inc. 1974. Page 15 (ur) · Walter Richards in William Chapman White's *Adirondack Country*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. reprinted by permission of Ruth M. White, 1968. Page 27 (c) · Courtesy of the *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, Saranac Lake. Page 28 (ur), 28 (lr) · Courtesy of Paul Smith's College. Page 28 (ul) · Mary E. Dombrowski, *The Adirondack Camp of the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century: A Wilderness Architecture*, Cornell University, 1974. Page 32 (ur) · Barbara McMartin, *Caroga* 1976, Courtesy of Town of Caroga. Page 32 (lr) · Larry Hart, *The Sacandaga Story*, Schenectady, N.Y. 1967. Page 24 (c), 48 (ur) · Courtesy of E. Gilbert Barker and the Penfield Foundation, 1977. Page 31 (ll) · C. R. Roseberry, *From Niagara to Montauk: The Scenic Pleasures of New York State*, Courtesy of the State University of New York Press, 1982. Page 13 (uc) · Lincoln Barnett, *The Ancient Adirondacks*, Courtesy of Time-Life Books, 1974. Page 8 (tc), 10 (ur), 10 (lc), 11 (ur), 11 (bc), 31 (ur) · Stuart D. Ludlum, *Exploring the Adirondacks 100 Years Ago*, Brodbeck and Ludlum, 1972. Page 10 (lr) R.A. Savage · Courtesy of the Adirondack Museum. Page 46 (uc, ur), *Atlas of Clinton County*, Beers, Ellis and Soule, 1869. Page 52 (lc) · *Atlas of Essex County*, O.W. Gray & Son, 1876.

Preface

This publication is about the 135 hamlets located within the Adirondack Park. It intends to introduce the hamlets of the park and to prepare the way for new investment opportunities for human resources and commitments to the cultural development and preservation of Adirondack hamlets. It attempts to recognize the special problems of the hamlets and to set the stage for their solution in later phases of work involving local, state and federal participation.

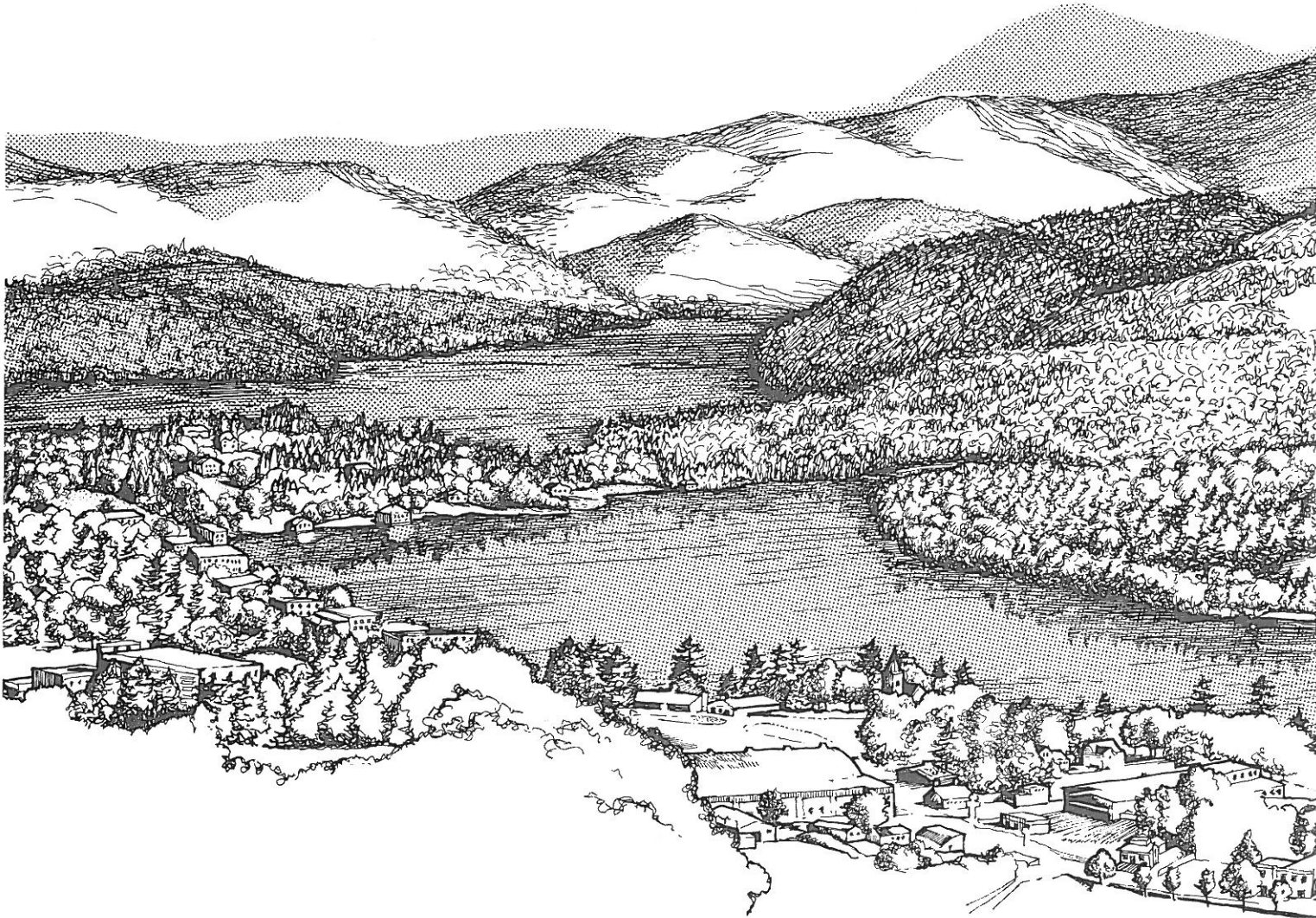
Most Adirondack Park hamlets have been bypassed by time and technology—in a sense, **frozen in time**. This is their charm, but also their plight as they struggle to survive. In the Adirondacks, every hamlet succumbs to the presence and power of nature. The great Adirondack wilderness is both the backdrop for their survival and opportunity for their success. The “forever wild” lands of the Park have been amply planned for and safeguarded since a constitutional amendment was enacted to protect them in 1894. What has gone unattended is planning for the future of the settled area of the Park.

How do we address the settlements of the Adirondacks in the future? The first step toward achieving the answer is to develop a way of dealing with them, their problems and outstanding qualities, and planning for these settlements within their own physical, economic and cultural setting.

History is important toward gaining a fuller knowledge of the Adirondack hamlets as places in time, as part of an historic continuum that dates back to the very first settlements in the Park. By understanding and interpreting the evolved form of Adirondack settlement, guidelines for the hamlets that are sensitive to the Adirondack region can be established. Such an interpretive program can become an important avenue for presenting a unified regional image of the Adirondacks and stimulating widespread interest in the settlements of the Adirondack Park.

The basic objective of the planning approach for the Adirondacks is to strike a **balance** between economic development and environmental preservation. By doing so, man and nature can be considered true partners in future planning and development efforts. In the Park, natural resources and man-made influences are inseparable—a reality that is essential in marketing the amenities of the hamlets. The ultimate goal is to encourage investment in the settlements of the Adirondacks by people inside and outside the Park. To meet the goal, this Phase One publication presents 135 hamlets and their unique qualities, past and present. Determining a clear path for their future and how to achieve it will become the important next step in Phase Two of the planning process.

"This publication explores the investment potential of human resources and cultural development of Adirondack hamlets."



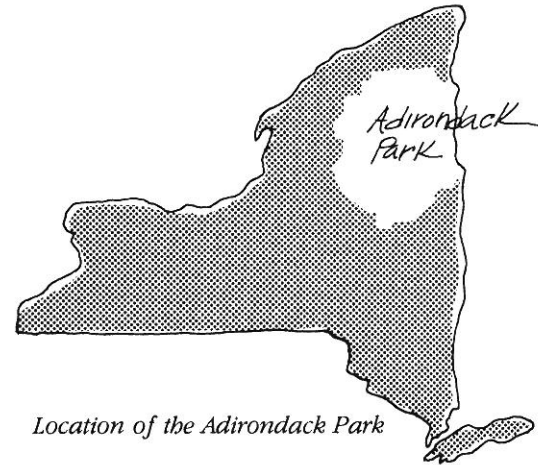
Chapter One

The Process Begins

Development and Preservation

"The people [of the Adirondacks] have long since become accustomed to living with nature; they are a part of it, married to it in a way that visitors from drearier topographies can never understand. It is their institution, their civilization, their art . . . Spring and fall are dearly loved, winter is barely tolerated and summer is mostly for making money."

(Bemstein, *The Sticks*, 1971)



Location of the Adirondack Park



Rural settlements throughout the country are confronted with a major contradiction of goals that can be summed up in the following question posed not too long ago by a resident of Essex, New York: "How can we preserve the positive rural environment that we call 'home' and at the same time improve our economic condition so that we and our children can remain here?" This basic question raises the central issue in rural community planning today shared by virtually all villages and hamlets of non-urbanized regions. While recent demographic figures show rural America's population growing faster than urban America's, the rural villages and hamlets are struggling to survive. They are at once popular and poor, educated and illiterate, beautiful and deteriorating. The restructuring of public expenditures has broadened even further the rural policy gap where limited resources are spread too thinly over a given region resulting in little, if any, impact on revitalizing small rural settlements. Public institutions as well as private concerns are aware of the relative lack of political and economic power of rural areas as compared to urban areas and the ramifications of increasing environmental, energy and fiscal constraints on future development.

In the early 1970's New York mirrored national concern for ecology and pollution control with a resource protection program for the private lands of the Adirondack Park that regulated new regional-scale development as well as providing a planning process for the vast state owned lands in the park. As noted in the Preface, the private land use plan calls for a balance of natural, social and economic needs. The APA Act is similar in some respects to state laws passed in Vermont, Florida, Oregon, Hawaii, California, New Jersey and elsewhere.

The state's rules and land ownership contribute to a significantly different physical and institutional setting for Adirondack settlements. Though they share problems with rural settlements elsewhere, they may not fit the yardsticks used by state and federal programs, or a private developer, to repair roads and bridges, assist with redevelopment, or to carry on day-to-day business.

This report is intended to introduce these settlements, so often unnoticed or ignored in literature about the Adirondacks; it is an initial prospectus, intended to mobilize the human and institutional resources that are necessary to realize tangible investments.



As of this writing, Phase One of the study is complete. This publication is aimed not merely at the county planning officials, but at the many inhabitants and visitors to the Adirondack region, the state-level decision makers, and the many to whom the Adirondack region remains a mystery. While the descriptive survey lists many of the problems peculiar to the Adirondack communities, it at the same time reveals the great potential for economic revitalization in the region's settlements and speaks to the unique quality and character that only the Adirondacks and its people can take credit for. So, as the bearer of both good and bad news, this report, and the study results it contains, is the stepping off point for Phase Two.

Reasons for the study

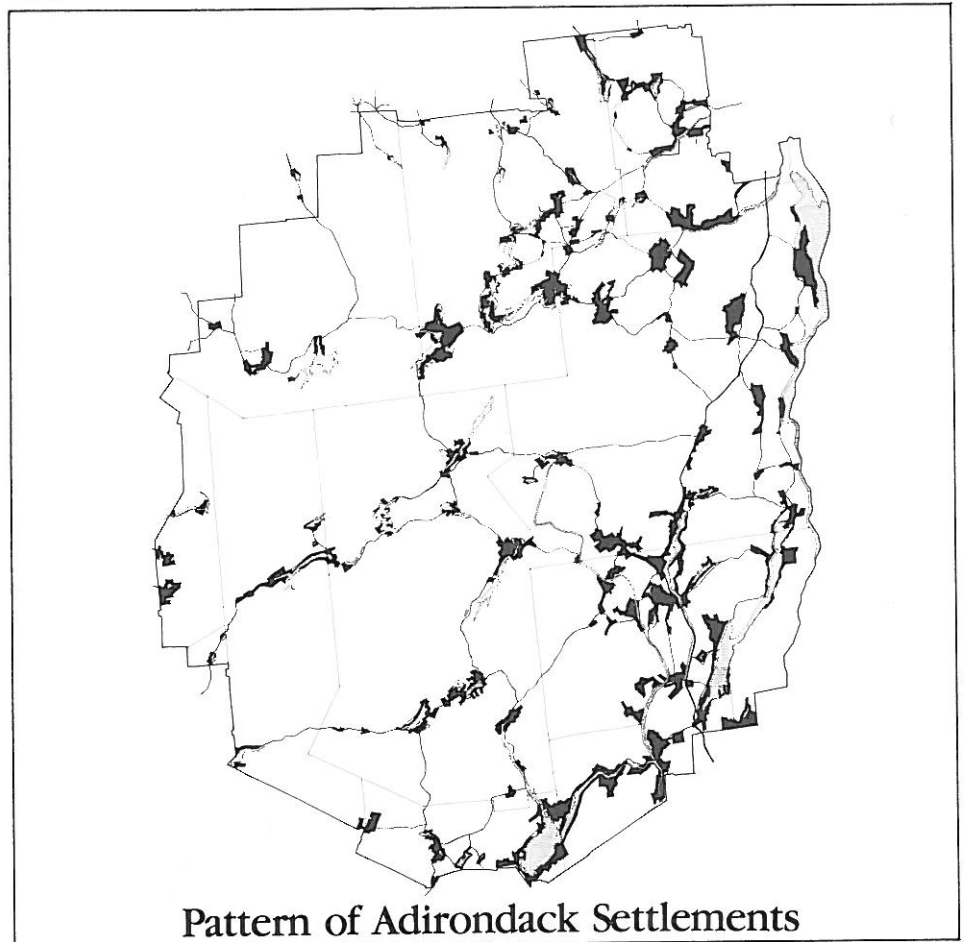
Three fundamental ideas lay the cornerstones of the study:

1. to analyze common problems and potentials in the hamlets for determining types of settlements in the Adirondacks and their pressing needs,
2. to develop revitalization strategies and policy plans for counteracting physical and economic deterioration of hamlets in the Park,
3. to market opportunities of Adirondack hamlets to inside and outside audiences by interpreting and communicating their important natural and cultural heritage.

Designing the Study

Faced with the visible deterioration of Adirondack hamlets and villages, and eager to compensate for the impact of limited resources spread too thinly over the region, four Adirondack counties (Clinton, Essex, Hamilton, St. Lawrence) and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) contracted with Roger Trancik, Urban Design Consultant, to explore creative and unique ways to close the rural policy gap. It was decided that a two-phase study would take place. The first phase, a descriptive phase, would look at all the settlement areas in the Park and determine how and why they came into existence. It also would involve grouping them into logical categories for purposes of studying their common characteristics and eventually selecting sample communities representing the larger group of Adirondack hamlets. It was hoped that this process would inform the policies and priorities for directing state and federal assistance programs toward the actual needs of the Adirondack region.

The second phase of the study would be prescriptive using the sample communities derived from Phase One. Phase Two would develop detailed plans and strategies for the sample communities and would outline action programs for their implementation.



"While other sections of the country developed and prospered, the mountain regions were left in isolation." (Aber and King, Tales from an Adirondack County)



Present-day view of Old Adirondack

Plight of the Hamlets

Hamlets of the Adirondack region share a number of common problems which are important to understand before speculating on their future. The list is lengthy and in many cases one problem's solution is increasingly complicated by the way in which all problems are interconnected. The need for a comprehensive understanding of these problems is therefore important to bear in mind.

Small and Isolated

Because of their small size and relative isolation there is not available in most hamlets the minimum level of human and fiscal resources to actively deal with the complexities of development planning. Consequently the hamlets lack organizational abilities to administer, communicate and review planning programs.

Unstable Economies

Unstable local economies, below poverty income levels and high unemployment present another set of frequently occurring problems in the Adirondacks. First, because many settlements have been historically tied to one industry their economic base lacks the diversity which safeguards them against the impact of an industry's departure. Furthermore, the substantial fluctuation of an Adirondack hamlet's local economy from season to season may be due to a heavy reliance on recreation and tourism—an economy affected by the vagaries of the weather and swings in the nation's economy. The resulting instability of annual

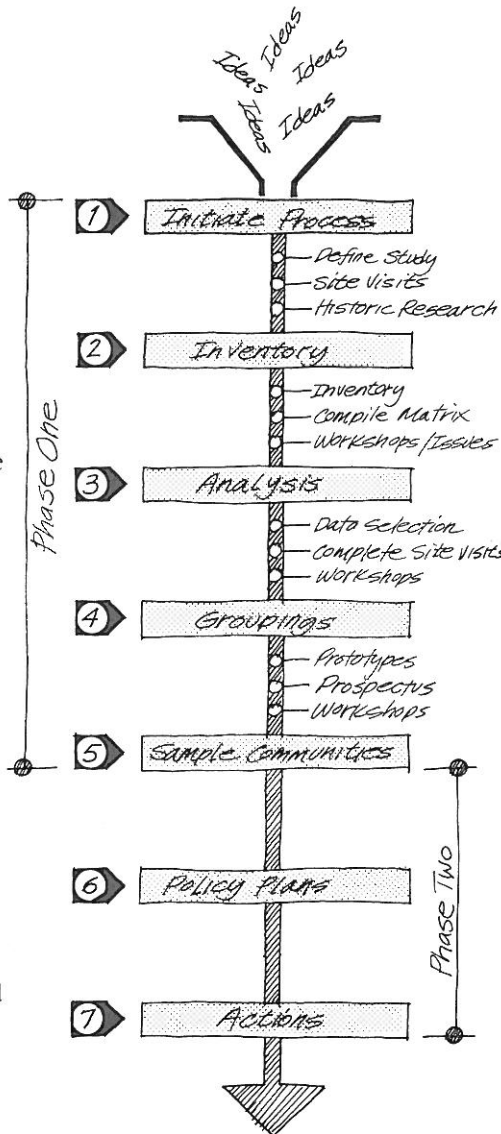


A trading post in the hamlet of Number Four

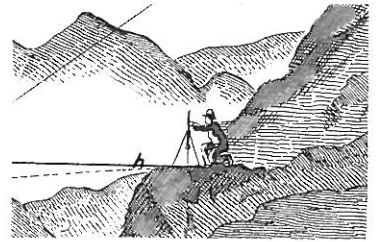
income and the limited prospects nationwide for rural industrial development, compound to create a situation in which the region's youth leave Adirondack communities and seek employment elsewhere. A general lack of support from state and federal agencies and private financing establishments leaves the small local businessperson, who is willing to take a risk, to struggle to make a living. In order to compete in the marketplace, the business often resorts to unusual advertising modes—the small business gets the big colorful sign—the result of competition for a limited clientele. Often these signs are out of character with both the place they advertise and the hamlet, creating a visual assault along the roadway.

Local Perceptions

Local perceptions of state regulatory constraints on development compound physical and transportation factors that discourage new development. Without new tax revenues and public/private investment initiatives municipal revenues and services languish. Municipalities cannot maintain and improve the hamlet's physical appearance including its public areas, buildings and water and sewer systems. The vacant sites and buildings, which in other communities appear as opportunities to investors, remain vacant and abandoned. Streets and sidewalks, lacking commercial activity, remain in a state of disrepair. Dying trees are not



Process Diagram



replaced, further adding to the image of a ghost town where boarded-up facades and overgrown sites predominate. The community perceives itself in a double bind. On the one hand, the state gives scant attention to its special problems with state land ownership, regulations and policies. On the other, a deteriorating service capability discourages those investors who might be attracted by the pristine natural environment.



The Housing Dilemma

The need for affordable quality housing for young and old populations has become a key concern in the region. The prohibitive costs of housing often lead young couples to consider the mobile home as an alternative which seldom benefits the owner in equity building and is rarely in keeping with the overall visual character of a rural hamlet. The lack of appropriate housing for the elderly is apparent throughout the region as well. In many cases, opportunities for overcoming the housing problem do exist but remain unknown to the majority of the people who stand to benefit from them.

A Visitor's Perception

Unable to improve housing, encourage economic development, and upgrade their community appearance, hamlets have difficulty attracting visitors and tourists to the area. Few communities have areas for pedestrian activities, off-street parking, parks, village squares, picnic areas, or places to stop for a cool drink, rest and "take in the town". Public restroom facilities and public information centers that advertise both the hamlet and the region are lacking. Without these amenities the perception of an overall "park feeling" is even harder to recognize and the unique experience of travelling through the Adirondack Park region goes unnoticed.

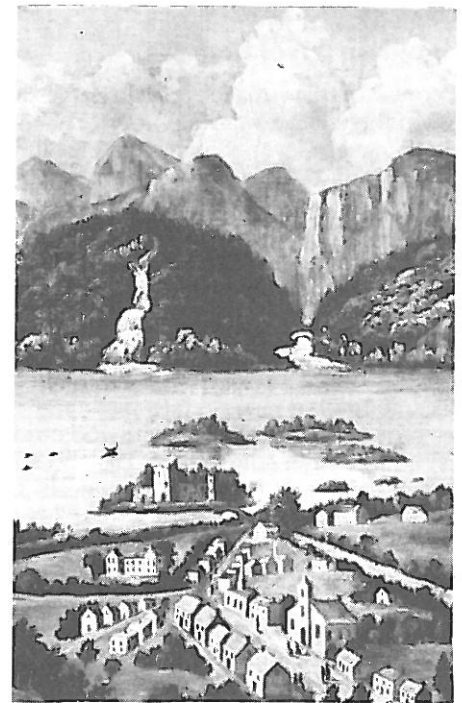
Adirondack Physical Dimensions

When one hears about the Adirondacks it is easy to become captivated by the endless adjectives which accompany its physical description. It is the largest park in the lower 48 states of the United States and the biggest wilderness area east of the Mississippi River. Its land area, totaling six million acres, equals that of the State of Vermont. The forest preserve lands of the Park were proclaimed Forever Wild in 1894, representing about 40% of the Adirondack Park as we know it today. The remaining 60% of land is owned by private individuals, local municipalities and business interests. Today the public and private lands intertwine in checkerboard patterns of ownership. In an area so vast, a population of only 125,000 people lives, spread amongst over 100 settlements.

Like punching the numbers on a calculator, the Adirondack region's immense proportions continue to total up. The 46 peaks of the high country are dominated by the 5,344 foot elevation of Mt. Marcy as it rears up majestically on the horizon and falls abruptly to the east, in a 40 mile distance meeting Lake Champlain at 100 feet above sea level. Lake Champlain, the "inland sea," forms the eastern boundary of the Park and

stretches on a north-south axis for 136 miles from Whitehall, New York to St. Johns, Quebec, connecting the great St. Lawrence and Hudson Rivers by way of a canal system. To the west of the Park the foothills reach out to Tug Hill, Watertown and Lake Ontario. The St. Lawrence Agricultural Valley forms the northern edge and to the south the Adirondacks blend into the urbanized corridor along the New York Thruway—one of the major access points from which 55 million people, 1/4 of the US population as well as millions from Canada can find themselves within a day's reach of the Adirondacks!

These endless facts and figures only measure the surface and fail to communicate the total picture about the unique lure of the Adirondacks—that quality which sets them apart from any place else. The adjectives and the descriptions may entice one to visit or even to settle there, but there is much more that encourages them to stay.

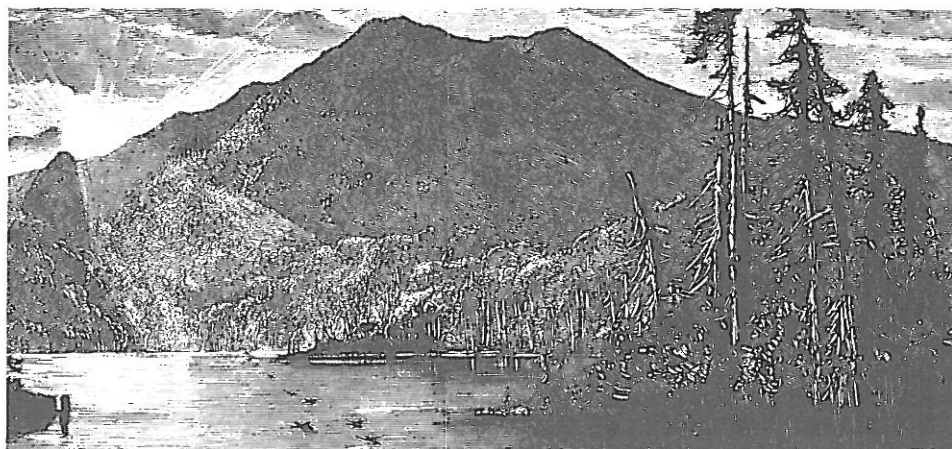


Allegory of the Adirondack Region (R.A. Savage)

"On canvas, the human figure became almost lost to the panoramas of mountains, woods, and water spread with brush and pen over the page."

Mysterious Adirondack Qualities

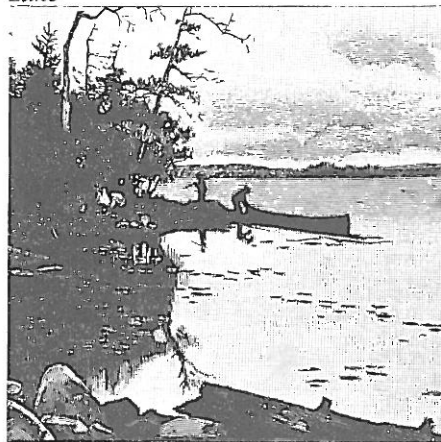
An aura of mystery hovers over this area where one can hear the lonely cry of a loon echoing across some distant lake on a summer evening or walk the damp fern-bordered path of a mountain glade. The region's mystery is contagious and few leave the area without having been cast under its spell. For more than a century writers have captured the Region's mysterious quality between their pages. Verplanck Colvin, a mountaineer of the 19th Century wrote, "few fully understand what the Adirondack wilderness is. It is a mystery even to those who have crossed and recrossed it by boats, along its avenues, the lakes and on foot through its vast and silent recesses." More than 100 years later Jane Keller in her book *The Adirondack Wilderness* went on to write "generations of people have noticed how different the Adirondacks seem from their neighbors, the Green Mountains in Vermont, the Berkshires in Massachusetts and the Catskills farther south in New York." Grandeur, more mysterious, more interesting, becomes the writer's language of description. But the Adirondacks have long captured the sensibility and spirit of others. The deep silent forests, the tumbling streams, the waterfalls, and the still lakes with their soaring mountains beyond provided the inspiration to artists who were quickly lured by the desire to transfer the region's untamed quality to the canvas. On the canvas, the human figure became almost lost to the panoramas of mountains, woods and water spread with brush and pen over the page. Evocative because of its unknown silent and sublime mystery, its wildness and romance, the landscape looms ever larger. To artists such as Thomas Cole and Asher B. Durand, arriving at Schroon Lake in 1837, the rock strewn overgrown islands floating on glass-like lakes, the craggy weather-beaten pines, the moss-shrouded bogs, became their subject matter. The lithographers stone and the engravers plate allowed artists like John W. Hill and Cromwell Ingham to send the message of the Adirondacks' wildness and beauty to press—through popular magazines, newspapers and histories of the region.



The cry of the loon on St. Regis Lake

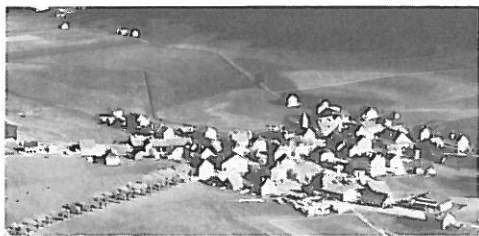


Mysterious Adirondack qualities on Swan Lake



Searching for a Unified Image . . .

So today, with physical dimensions and mysterious qualities in mind, what exactly is the unified image of the Adirondacks that emerges? Picture postcards, glossy public relations' flyers, ads for resort vacations, Olympic attractions, fishing and skiing promotions, I LOVE NY brochures, seem to transfer yet another image of a place that isn't really that much different from other tourist meccas offering mountains, motels and recreational events. And what of the settlement areas—the people who live in the Adirondacks—the true heirs to the beauty, the history and the hardships of life in a wilderness area which has seen periods of tremendous exploitation and transition? Close your eyes and imagine a typical Adirondack hamlet—*not* a quaint Vermont town or a Maine fishing village. And how would one characterize a native Adirondacker? Not a Yankee, not what a mid-westerner would call a "New Yorker". Perhaps the Adirondacks lacks today that unified image captured by the artist and writer of the last century. Capturing that image in a contemporary context where romance is woven with reality, is what this publication attempts to begin. Alongside the facts, the figures, the mystery, belongs the story of the region's people and its settlement areas—the combination which creates a unified image of what the Adirondacks truly are.



What Is a Hamlet?

... a special place

The Adirondack settlement is a special place in a mysterious natural setting. Its distinct characteristics separate it from hundreds of similar communities throughout the north-east. William White describes the special qualities of the Adirondack settlement this way:

No other state or national park has the unique development that is Adirondack history. Few have thriving villages right next to state woods at the back door, setting a pattern of life unique in America. It is that inseparable connection between the Adirondack woods, open on all sides, and the Adirondack people that makes the area what it is.

This inseparable connection between man and nature bestows upon the Adirondack settlements a unique sense of place. One cannot imagine an Adirondack hamlet without thinking of its natural setting. In addition to nature, those who live in the Adirondack settlements are also special. In his book, *The Ancient Adirondacks*, Lincoln Barnett observed that "no special cultural ties, no unique language or accent, no historical traditions unite the people of the towns and hamlets within the Park. But they do share a fierce independence, a love of the woods, and a spirit of isolationism." Describing the quality of an Adirondack hamlet and its inhabitants is easier than defining what the term means.

The Term "Hamlet"

The confusion of terms was the first obstacle to overcome in this study. In the Adirondacks, "village", "hamlet", "town", "settlement", and "community" all seem to mean different things to different people. "Hamlet" means one thing in planning terminology, "village" is understood to be an incorporated entity, and "town" is taken to mean a township rather than a settlement. It was decided to eliminate such distinctions. As a result, the definition of a settlement became a group of 40 or more structures with at least one commercial facility in a prescribed area.

Any settlement, whether large or small, meeting this criteria was included in the project. Therefore, the terms villages, hamlets, towns and communities have been used interchangeably throughout this report. Even the simple definition above proved sometimes difficult to interpret. The boundaries of many Adirondack settlements are dispersed and indefinite making the physical limits difficult to measure. In spite of such difficulties with definition, the image and characteristics of a "typical Adirondack hamlet" began to emerge.

The Typical Hamlet

What would be the essence of the typical Adirondack hamlet if one could be identified? It would be small in population and number of structures, with the residents being predominantly permanent rather than seasonal. The village core would consist of

three or four major structures including a general merchandise store, post office and volunteer fire station. Most hamlets have a very close relationship to water, whether it be a spacious lakeshore setting or a noisy river rushing through the center of the village. Settlements are often found in a valley corridor and the plan of the village is generally informal (unlike the villages of Vermont organized around the central green) being almost "frontier-like" in character. The outstanding quality of the Adirondack hamlet remains ever present—its close tie to nature and the intermingling of human activity and natural resources.

In order to truly understand the uniqueness of an Adirondack hamlet, it was necessary to delve into the historic evolution of settlement patterns in the Adirondack Park as a whole. This historical summary is the theme of the following chapter, *The Hamlets in Time*.

